

Dear ALWTRT Member or Interested Party:

NMFS has submitted the below notice for broadcast on NOAA weather radio and as a USCG notice to mariners:

OVER FIFTY ENDANGERED NORTHERN RIGHT WHALES ARE KNOWN TO BE PRESENT IN THE GREAT SOUTH CHANNEL CRITICAL HABITAT AREA AND NEAR THE SHIPPING LANES. MARINERS ARE URGED TO MAINTAIN A SHARP LOOKOUT AND USE CAUTION AROUND RIGHT WHALES. APPROACH CLOSER THAN 500 YARDS IS PROHIBITED AND MAY RESULT IN A VIOLATION OF FEDERAL OR STATE LAW. FISHERMEN ARE URGED TO REMOVE AND NOT SET FIXED GEAR IN THE GREAT SOUTH CHANNEL CRITICAL HABITAT AREA IN JUNE.

NMFS has issued this notice to encourage actions that reduce the risk of ship strike and entanglement due to the large number of North Atlantic right whales in the GSC Critical Habitat Area. In recent weeks, NOAA Fisheries aerial survey flights have repeatedly sighted more than 50 right whales and other large whales in the area.

NMFS is encouraging fishermen to remove and not set fixed gear in the GSC Critical Habitat Area, which includes the Sliver Area, in June as vertical lines associated with fixed gear can pose an entanglement risk to whales, numerous species of whales have been seen in the area- some in high concentration, and right whales are common in the GSC Critical Habitat Area during June. Recent and archival right whale sighting advisories can be obtained on the ALWTRP web page (<http://www.nero.nmfs.gov/whaletrp/>) by going to "Elements of the Plan," and clicking on "Right Whale Sighting Advisory System" (SAS), or by going to http://whale.wheelock.edu/whalenet-stuff/reportsRW_NE/. Information about the "Mandatory Ship Reporting System" for ships greater than 300 tons entering right whale critical habitat can be found on the ALWTRP web page link under "Related Information" (http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/prot_res/PR2/Conservation_and_Recovery_Program/msr/msrhome.html).

This notice is not issued under the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan s (ALWTRP) Dynamic Area Management (DAM) Program.

As an ALWTRT member or interested party, NMFS appreciates your assistance in spreading the word about the occurrence of whales in the GSC Critical Habitat Area and the marine mammal protection actions described in the notice above.